NEFIRS News

How HIPAA Affects NEFIRS

Several departments have been asking how the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 or HIPAA affects NEFIRS. The USFA's view is "that 49 U.S.C. 2208, which provides for the collection of data about, among other things, the 'number of injuries and deaths resulting from fires, including the maximum available information on the specific causes and nature of such injuries and deaths, and information on property losses,' constitutes a law providing for reporting of disease or injury (and arguably public health surveillance, investigation and intervention) under Section 1178 of HIPAA. Consequently, we believe that provision of this information to NFIRS would not be a violation of HIPAA and will continue to collect the existing data elements."

The State Fire Marshal's legal counsel opinion is that fire departments, EMS and rescue squads must comply with HIPAA because they are providing medical treatment. The patient must consent by signing a form to allow specific patient information (name, social security number, etc) to be collected and passed along to a health care organization.

As long as departments do not complete the patient's name on the Civilian Casualty, Fire Service Casualty and/or EMS modules they should be in compliance with HIPAA requirements. Date of birth and gender without the names is not specific enough to identify a patient. Date of birth and gender are required fields on the Civilian Casualty and Fire Service Casualty modules but optional on the EMS module.

Timely Reporting

I'd like to thank everyone for sending their reports in more often. It has been a great help so far. You are all doing a great job completing the reports. Keep up the good work!!

Federal Data Entry Tool Users

Those who are using the Federal Data Entry Tool should have received a notice that a new version is available. It is important that you download and install this new version as soon as possible.

Users should also open the Configuration Tool and click on the Advanced tab. If it shows that you are working in the offline mode than your data is being stored on your local hard drive and not on the federal server. If this is the case, you will need to export the data from your database and either send it to me or change to online mode and then import the data to the server yourself.

I recommend that you always work in the online mode so that you don't need to worry about sending data to me. The data will be there on the server and I will have access to it when I log on.

If you have any questions about how to import/export data or change to online mode give me a call (402-471-9472) and I'll walk you through it.

Plus-One Codes

If your department is using plus-one codes please send us a list. We would like to coordinate these codes so all departments are using the same codes.

Email Addresses

We're still trying to get email addresses for fire departments. If you have an email address and have not let us know or your email address has changed, please email it to lloyd@sfm.state.ne.us.

We plan to start emailing press releases, newsletters and other pertinent information to fire departments to save on printing costs. The Lieutenant Governor has also asked us for this information so he can keep fire chiefs informed about homeland security activities.

New Website

Our new website can be found at: www.sfm.state.ne.us . I am still working on revising it and giving it a totally new look. In the meantime I have added past editions of the NEFIRS News in case you have misplaced your copy. Click on the link to Forms and Publications on the home page and this will take you to the links to the past newsletters. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to view them.

NFIRS 5.0 Reminders

NOTE: References to fields and sections are by the names the USFA gave the objects. Some software vendors changed the names and/or locations. Hopefully you will still understand what I am referring to. If not, let me know.

♦ Last month I stated that the EMS Module should only be used for non-fire incidents. To clarify, the EMS Module is an optional module that can be used with any type of incident response.

If a civilian or firefighter are injured at a fire incident the Civilian Fire Casualty and/or Fire Service Casualty Modules are required. The EMS Module may be completed IN ADDITION to the Civilian Fire Casualty and/or Fire Service Casualty modules if the department wants to collect the additional information, but it is not required that you also complete an EMS Module.

I apologize for any confusion. If you have questions, contact Cathy or me.

♦ A Fire Service Casualty Module should be completed for any injury or fatality to a fire-fighter regardless of the incident type (fire or non-fire).

♦ I've had a couple of questions on how to enter a Canadian address. In Appendix C of the Handbook there are Canadian postal codes listed but I have discovered the federal system isn't set up yet to accept them. I have checked with the NFIRS Help Desk and you should be able to enter OO (two letter O's not zeros) in the state field. Then you will need to enter the entire city and state information in the City field.

If you are using a vendor's software and they allow you to choose the Canadian postal codes go ahead and select them and I'll deal with any errors that may occur when I receive the data.

♦ There are two parts to Section C On-Site Materials on the Fire Module. If you are completing paper, you may enter up to three codes but you must also check one of the four corresponding boxes on the right. If using software, you should have a field to enter the On-Site Materials code and another field to indicate the type of material (bulk storage, processing or manufacturing, packaged goods for sale, or repair or service).

Completion of this field is also only required if the Property Use coded on the Basic Module is in the 500, 600, 700 or 800 series of codes.

♦ Although the field E2 Factors Contributing to Ignition on the Fire Module is not required, it does provide beneficial information to further explain the Cause of Ignition. Please try to complete this field whenever possible.

♦ Several departments will code E3 Human Factors Contributing to Ignition on the Fire Module to 3 Unattended person when completing an incident for a cooking or grass fire. I'm guessing the intent is to convey that no one was watching the fire or what was cooking at the time the fire occurred.

The definition in the Handbook for this code includes "latch key" situations whether the person involved is young or old and situations where the person involved lacked supervision of care.

♦ When entering the location information for an incident on the Basic Module, please utilize all the fields available and use them as intended. The information is broken down the way it is in order to utilize GIS (mapping) software.

Street address: The number should be entered in the Number/Mile field, the prefix (East, North, South, West, Southwest, etc) should be entered in the Street Prefix field, the street name in the Street or Highway field, the street type (street, road, lane, circle, highway, etc) in the Street Type field and if any suffix (East, South, North, West, Southwest, etc) in the Suffix field. Please do not put the entire address in the Street or Highway field except for Rural Routes as noted below.

For an address like 246 Highway 2, enter the 246 in the Number/Mile field, the 2 in the Street or Highway field and Highway in the Street Type field.

Apartment, suite or lot numbers should be entered in the Apartment/Suite/Room field. Please do not enter a pound sign (#) before the number or Apt 5, Suite 21, etc. Just enter the number 5 or 21 or 5A.

Intersection: Enter one street or highway in the Street or Highway field and the other in the Cross Street or Directions field.

Rural Routes: Some departments enter rural route address (RR 1, Box 20 or HC1, Box 5). If used these should be entered entirely in the Street or Highway field. We would prefer though that instead of using this type of address that you enter the information as directions. Reports will not be returned if RR or HC are used.

Highway/Mile Marker: If the incident occurred on a highway or the interstate at a certain mile marker, enter the mile marker number in the Number/Mile field the highway number in the Street or Highway field and Highway in the Street Type field. If the incident occurred on the interstate enter I80 or I-80 in the Street or Highway field and leave Street Type blank.

♦ Please do not abbreviate city names or develop your own codes when completing location information (exceptions: St for Saint and Ft for Fort are acceptable), especially if you are using software. Also don't use housing addition/subdivision names in place of the city or add rural to the city name. I have spent many hours correcting this and the location information in the database so things will be correct in the state and federal database.

Keep in mind when completing incident reports that members of your department are not the only ones seeing the data. If other users are not familiar with the state they aren't going to know what is entered is an abbreviation or code instead of a real city name.

It also complicates searches for information if the full name isn't there. If I need to find fires in Bellevue and the city is entered as BEL, I would have to broaden the search and then sort through the results which would include Bellevue, Belgrade, Belden, Bellwood, and Belvidere when all I wanted was fires that occurred in Bellevue.

♦ Software users: Please include your FDID number and timeframe in the filename (example: 99001June02.txt). Having this information in the filename helps to locate the right file if needed.

♦ When completing a report for a confined fire within a structure (Incident Types 113-118) don't forget to complete Section H2 Detector. An error occurs if this information is missing.

♦When completing the mobile property information on the Fire Module please note that for Section H2 there is a separate code for automobile/passenger car and pickup. A passenger vehicle is code 11 and a pickup truck is code 22.

♦ The incident number is a numeric field. Do NOT enter an alpha or special character (-, /). If you use software it will probably allow you to do this, but your report will not be easily retrieved if it even can be retrieved. If you are adding letters to your incident number in order to keep them separate, e.g., fires from rescue calls, you could do this by starting fire calls with 1 or 03 (last two digits of the year) and rescue calls with 2 or 2003 or some other numbering scheme. You may also be able to accomplish what you are trying to do by using text in the incident number by utilizing the Station field and/or the District field.

♦ The intention of the Exposure Number field on the Basic Module is not to enter the number of exposures that may have occurred. If there are exposure fires, a separate report needs to be completed for each exposure. The incident number would be the same on all reports but the exposure number would change - 000 for the original, 001 for the first exposure, 002 for the second, etc.

♦ This is the last year to report using NFIRS 4.1. Effective January 1, 2004 ONLY NFIRS 5.0 reports will be accepted. I still have a very small supply of the NFIRS 4.1 incident report but plenty of the civilian and firefighter casualty forms if you need them. Pre-addressed envelopes are also available to mail in either 4.1 or 5.0 paper reports.

♦ WE WILL ACCEPT PAPER REPORTS IN NFIRS 5.0!! We know it is not feasible for everyone to buy a computer and software.

♦ This is sent to the chief but I know that the chief isn't always the one completing the reports. Please be sure to pass this on to the person who is completing the reports so they can fill the reports out correctly. THANKS!!